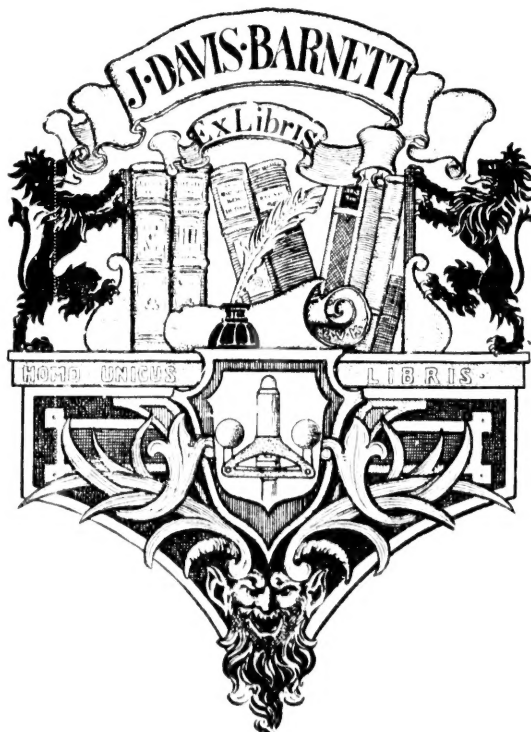


This Book
may be used
only within
the Library



University of Western Ontario
LIBRARY

LONDON - CANADA

Class

DA561
J4

FIFTEENTH THOUSAND.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "GINX'S BABY."

THE
BLOT
ON

THE QUEEN'S HEAD



THE QUEEN'S HEAD;
OR,
HOW LITTLE BEN, THE HEAD WAITER,
CHANGED THE SIGN OF THE "QUEEN'S INN"
TO
"EMPRESS HOTEL, LIMITED,"
AND THE CONSEQUENCES THEREOF.

BY
A GUEST.

STRAHAN & Co., 34, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1876.

All Rights Reserved.]

[SIXPENCE

ADVERTISEMENT.

It was only at breakfast this morning that the Author, feeling a deep repugnance to the Royal Titles Bill, and seeing how rapidly it was being forced through Parliament, conceived the idea of the following trifle. With the energetic assistance of his publishers it has been wholly written and printed in eleven hours, and is submitted to the public subject to these disadvantages.

34. *Palernoster Row,*

Saturday Evening, March 25th.

69610

James Barnet

THE BLOT

9/22

ON

THE QUEEN'S HEAD.

THE Queen's Inn was known the wide world over. It was indeed the greatest, the most wonderful inn in the world. Beginning in a humble way at some time long since forgotten, it had gone on century after century increasing its business and extending its buildings, until it grew beyond the dimensions of any other inn under one management that ever was heard of. Its walls were ancient, thick, and strong. So strong that Time had not crumbled them. Age had knocked his head against them, and found it would not do. Earthquakes had tried to shake them, but they seemed to be rooted in the middle of the earth. Wars and revolutions had swept around them, and tremendous fights had occurred within them, but they remained as solid and as stolid as if nothing had happened. Mobs and monarchs had sworn at them in a rage without producing any impression. They were not like the walls of Jericho. All the rams'

horns in the universe would not have stirred an atom of mortar in the powerful old building. Every one was proud of the marvellous hostelry. It had always been conducted in a spirited, defiant, self-reliant sort of way. There was perfect freedom to guests to come and go. They were well treated, whoever had the management. Sometimes it was a host, sometimes a hostess, but that did not make much difference. The proprietors always insisted on keeping up the inn on the most liberal scale, on free and easy principles, and with perfect independence of outside influences. Any one could go to it and was welcome, especially if he had his pockets full. For the inn by the way was a money-making concern. It laid itself out for that. But it was more. It was a refuge for all sorts of people. There were sumptuous rooms for Monarchs, or roving Princes and Princesses, or Shahs, or Sultans, or Cadiş, or Republican Presidents, or Emperors of any colour, from Russia to Hayti. There were plainer rooms for poor patriots if they happened to want to hide from their countrymen or their creditors for a few days. There were even garrets where peripatetic revolutionists running away from the police of Germany, Russia, France, or Spain, or other places of that sort, could find appropriate beds and greasy food.

Nothing was more extraordinary than the way in which this inn had gone on extending. It was next door to the "Frogs and Lilies," and for some time, long ago, actually took up a good part of that inn and worked its business. Then it withdrew from that, and later on took up houses here and there for its increasing crowds of guests. It made provision for every colour and every kind of people. Thus at the time of which we are writing it was a great overgrown caravansary, spreading all over the place. The rival inns used to laugh at it. They also used to sneer. They said that such a huge and varied business must become unmanageable, and would some day go to pieces.

Here I regret to say that this opinion was sometimes shared by some of those who were born and brought up under its roof. Big Billy, who was at one time head waiter, and some of the other waiters, used to think so, and to wish that the proprietors would draw in their horns, and abandon some of the outlying houses. They said it was a nuisance to keep them up. But the proprietary was a large one. Great changes had taken place in it of late years. Whereas at one time it was claimed to be the right of one supreme head manager, who was generally a fool, and one or two of them nearly brought it to bankruptcy, it

had gradually come to be vested in a body of proprietors, who chose a chief manager to be host or hostess as the case might be, but insisted on having something to say themselves in the management. As these proprietors lived in the place, and used to hold meetings in the bar-parlour and the coffee-room, and let the officials—who consisted of the host, the head waiter, and a lot of sub-head-waiters—know pretty freely what they thought of them, it was not altogether so pleasant to the managers as they could have wished. But as they were well paid they managed one thing very well—that is, to do what the proprietors told them and conceal their chagrin if they felt any.

I said that the Queen's Inn extended all over the place. It not only had a Saxon court, a Celtic court, a Caledonian court, but it had bought, partly with money partly without, a big Alhambra-like palace of enormous size and with a prodigious business of a certain sort, which was called the Hindoo court. Moreover, it had stretched out in various directions, and added African courts, and American courts, and Pacific courts, and a lot of little isolated buildings for less important guests.

There were a number of other inns about, and though they could not really compete with

the Queen's Inn in some things, they used to be very pretentious, and to do a very fine business. Indeed some were imprudent enough to claim superiority. The difference between them and the Queen's Inn generally consisted in the management, and in the food and accommodation. One of them, called the "Yankee Doodle," was under a large proprietary, and generally had managers selected from among the servants. Most of the others had a single manager, who did pretty much as he liked, and in those inns the guests used to say they never knew their own minds or had their own way. They were obliged to eat, drink, and sleep as the manager ordered them, or they were bundled out pretty quick.

All these inns were called in modern phrase "hotels," and in nearly every case "Imperial Hotels." There was the "Imperial Eagle Hotel," the "Imperial Eagle with two Heads Hotel," "The Imperial Bear Hotel," and there was an "Imperial Frog Hotel," but a change had occurred in the proprietary of it, and the manager had withdrawn to the Queen's Inn, where he died very comfortably.

Of all these hotels the one that tried most to vie with the Queen's Inn, in extending its area and business, was "The Imperial Bear."

There the manager had it all his own way, and his own way was to push his custom in every quarter, and especially in the direction of the Alhambra Palace, which was called the Hindoo Court of the Queen's Inn. Whenever there was a chance the manager of the Imperial Bear annexed a new building or a small piece of land, and at the time of which we are writing, he had actually succeeded in getting possession of a house next but one to the Hindoo Court, called Kokand Alley.

The proprietors of the Queen's Inn, however, though they watched the progress of the "Imperial Bear" very closely, and had some anxiety that if he should get next door to the Alhambra, he might in making his extensions undermine that vast building, felt sure of their business, and were so rich and prosperous, that they assumed an air of indifference. They knew when the time came, if it ever came, they could hold their own against the competition of all the other hotels united, because the proprietors of the Queen's Inn were a great and rich and combined body—while there was always a good deal of dissatisfaction, open or concealed, in the other great inns, notwithstanding they had such big houses, and took on such imperious airs.

There was one thing about the Queen's Inn that all the proprietors and all the guests, and all who were in any way connected with it, were proud of, and that was that it was the Queen's Inn. It was and had been the Queen's Inn, and nothing else (with the exception of a few weeks when an interloper got in and called it "The Commonwealth," and even he, it was admitted, vastly improved its business), for all the time of its existence, and the Queen's Inn it was to remain till the end of time. When new courts were added, although they might be put under separate management on behalf of the proprietors, the Queen's Inn was the supreme name under which the court was ranged, and the Queen's Head always swung on the sign-board over the door. The truth is, you could not walk anywhere without coming across the sign of the Queen's Head, and I can assure you wherever that sign was seen men took off their hats to it, and said "That is the sign of the largest, the richest, the best, the freest and most comfortable inn in Christendom." No wonder, then, that the proprietors and all concerned in the Queen's Inn were proud of their inn, and proud of their name, and proud of their sign-board wherever it flapped and shone.

Now at the time of which I am writing, the

Queen's Inn was under the management of a hostess highly esteemed by all the proprietary. There never was a more amiable, virtuous, able, dignified, and hard-working manageress. Circumstances certainly kept her a good deal out of sight of the dwellers and guests in the Inn, but they understood and admitted the reasons for her seclusion, and knowing how well she attended to the superintendence, they were as satisfied as they could be under the circumstances, though they liked to see her going about the place, it looked so home-like. It was always the privilege of the manager or manageress—to coin a word not very elegant—to select their own sub-managers and subordinates.

I ought to explain that among the proprietary and the servants too, who were generally born and brought up under the roof, there was a division of opinion as to the way in which the business should be carried on. A large party was in favour of liberal arrangements, with no restrictions on personal freedom, but on the other hand of thorough economy in expenditure; and they even thought it would be a good thing to adopt the co-operative principle and to give the servants a voice in the management. This had to some extent been done. The head of this

party, one Big Billy, was a prodigiously clever fellow, and had been head waiter ; but he introduced such a lot of changes, and had such ideas about a chapel which the proprietary kept up for the use of the guests, and made himself so offensive to some foreign people with shovel hats and scarlet stockings who came poking about the inn, as he suspected, in the interest of rival hotels, that he was incontinently turned out, and now went about disconsolately, with a dirty napkin over his arm, making very bitter remarks. There was another waiter named Bobby, of the same way of thinking, who was also discarded, because he seemed rather blind to the wishes of the management, and was always stumbling about and treading on people's toes, or knocking their shins, not to mention the freedom with which he told them what he thought. There were a number of other very clever waiters who belonged to this party, but they had all been disgraced, and their pay having been reduced they were going about the inn very much out at elbows, and with their breeches at the knees looking as if they frequently went down upon them to ask for better times.

The party now in favour, however, and which went in for the old style of doing things, and insisted on no changes in the way of

managing the business, no alteration of forms, no new-papering of rooms, or substituting of modern iron bedsteads for the ancient and capacious coffer-dams wherein their ancestors used to bury themselves at night, or improving the management by admitting a lower class of waiters to a voice therein,—and also insisted on gorgeousness and old fashions, and great expenditure and high charges, and couldn't bear the new-fangled ideas of the "cheap and nasty" sort,—had for its head a curious, though a clever fellow, named Little Ben. You may judge that Little Ben was a clever fellow, when I tell you that he properly belonged to another inn called the Jerusalem Coffee-house, in a purlieu of the city, once in great repute, but rather depressed in circumstances just then. The people who came out of that inn were always clever, sharp, money-making men, with keen noses for their own interest in more senses than one; but they came of splendid stock all the same, and Little Ben was a fine specimen of them. He had a curly head, and a good forehead, and a determined mouth, and was altogether, to be a head waiter, a distinguished-looking fellow; only he had a habit of shuffling about on his feet in a shy way, which he had acquired no doubt in waiting a good deal on the manageress

and distinguished guests—for he rather affected to be on good terms with the best of the company, and when a waiter does that he can't be quite as bold in his demeanour as one would like.

Little Ben's history was a curious one. He turned out of the Jerusalem Coffee-House at a very early age, and totally abjured it. Then as a boy he took to chaffing monarchy, and singing songs against the established order of things, but that did not pay. Then he became aware of a power within him which he called Aryan art. He became a sign-painter and scene-painter for theatres. No one could paint more startling and successful curtains, with bright atmospheres of Turkey red and Prussian blue, with great floating bodies of Imperial purple clouds, with gorgeous temples or palaces, frequented by semi-nude nymphs and grand Adonises, in a blaze of lustrous robes, and surrounded with Sardanapalian magnificence, representing in fact an antique Aryan civilization modified by a strongly Oriental—not to say Judaic—taste for costume and ornaments of the Covent Garden or Wardour Street type. From these occupations he had, by dint of talent and self-appreciation, risen from the base employment of affording amusement to the public, to the higher and nobler position of confidential assis-

tant and head waiter to the lady manager of the Queen's Inn. And it must be owned he had in many respects discharged his duties in an able and commendable way. The managers of some of the outlying courts and houses had taken umbrage at the slighting way in which Big Billy and Bobby and their friends used to speak of them. But Ben let them know, through a lively, spry, and clever little Welshman who used to look after them, that it was intended to stick to them and keep them going as long as possible. And indeed they were very important to the success and permanence of the concern.

Then, again, the proprietors of several of those imposing Imperial Hotels had formed a combination, which looked very much like an attempt to close in the Hindoo Court altogether and prevent free access to it from the older Queen's Inn. But seeing this, and while they were negotiating together to buy out or expel the proprietor of the Sultan Hotel, who had become bankrupt, what does Little Ben do but slip round to Mr. Cadi, the manager of the "Pyramids and Pool Inn," and purchase the control of a little street called Canal Street! The other people were in a tremendous flutter, but they said Little Ben was a shrewd fellow. They knew he meant to keep the street, so they took no steps to prevent it, but

called and left cards of congratulation on the lady of the house.

This, then, was the state of things, and Little Ben was doing pretty successfully, with every chance of keeping his post, if he would only shuffle about quietly and keep on good terms with the gentry, when he was suddenly taken with the most extraordinary notion that ever entered the head of a manager of an inn.

Everybody knows that whatever there may be in any other name, there is a great deal in the name of an inn. It has associations, it is full of suggestions, it calls up pictures of repose, or comfort, or luxury, or good living, or the reverse. If the associations are happy, good for the inn. And the inn-keeper whose inn is known all over the world for its good management and splendid success, is a fool if he suddenly cuts the associations which endear it to all his customers and guests. "The Queen's Inn" was a name thus, as I may say, hallowed in the memories of all who knew it. When people heard of it they remembered how easy it was of access, how large and comfortable it was, what amazingly good accommodation it gave, and withal how well you were treated there, and how much more free you were there than in any of those other "hotels" so-called, even in that great raw pretentious build-

ing which wrote "Liberty Hall" across its front in big letters, but where when you went in you found people hissed you and wanted to bully you if you didn't happen to behave as they did. As for the other Imperial Hotels, they would not let you in without looking at your luggage, and the waiters watched you about as if you were a thief, all the time you stayed there.

So as I say everybody who was connected with the Queen's Inn, or had ever been there, or had ever heard of it, respected and even loved it by that name, and always associated it with good living and success. And the great sign of this was the great sign over the door of the old inn, and over the doors of the courts and houses connected with it, which was a Queen's Head, *bare*, to show as it were that it represented a Queen who reigned not by virtue of a metal crown, but of her inherent unadorned dignity and the love of the people.

It was a pretty sign. It had been painted many a long year ago, and many able artists had had a hand in it. Storms had burst over it, winds had rattled and shaken it, fiery suns and freezing winters had worked their worst upon it. Yet its glorious and wondrous colours remained fresh and untarnished as ever, and whenever a weary traveller saw it his heart bounded within him.

Strangers respected it. Ignorant and gentle people far off heard of it with admiration, and often almost took it for an object of worship. Within the inn itself, excepting a few pot-boys who had thrown paper pellets at it, and a boot-black or two who got a good licking for deriding it, it was looked upon as the great embodiment of the glory of the inn, the indestructible token of its supremacy.

Nevertheless the devil in some shape or other put it into the heart of that subtle Jew, Little Ben, to alter and deflower the glory, the simplicity, the fame of this unrivalled sign.

How this was I cannot tell. Though he came from the Jerusalem Coffee-house, Little Ben was a thorough-going Queen's Inn man—as much so as any one in it. But there was one thing he had not left behind him in Jerusalem—that was a florid Oriental fancy, Aryan art, and a taste for dealing in Brummagem gold. It can't be helped. It was one of his native weaknesses. All great waiters have such weaknesses. But it was at that weak spot that the devil approached him. And knowing that he had a fancy for titivation, and for Aryan art, and for splendour and display, and for exciting the wonder of gods and men, and all that sort of thing, and that he was rather proud of his early sign-and-scene painting, the Arch-Enemy

inspired Little Ben with the idea that he could improve upon the title of the Queen's Inn, and give additional splendour to the sign of the Queen's Head!

Some people were wicked enough to say that the notion came from the Lady of the House. But few believed it. She had always shown a just and haughty pride in her superior position. She loved the name of the Inn and the title thereof. She always upheld them both with becoming dignity. She knew there was nothing on earth superior to it in the managerial point of view. And she looked upon the new-fangled, arrogant, assuming titles and signs of the more modern hotels with respect enough for their greatness and show, but with a proper appreciation of her own position and good name. If any of those big, Imperial concerns or their managers were to show any airs she could treat them with supercilious disdain. She could well afford to do so. She couldn't walk over her enormous establishment in a week, and if these other people did not give her her due she knew that she need not go beyond her own house to find good company and esteem enough to satisfy the most aspiring hostess.

There were two places in the Queen's Inn where what might be termed its legislation was

carried on. There were the people who met in the coffee-room, a big handsome place, devoted to the most distinguished guests and proprietors. Then there was the bar-room, where the general opinion was more freely expressed, and in which Little Ben, or any other head waiter for the time being, used to take the lead. The principal waiters in the coffee-room were very exalted personages. Their liveries were superb, their pay excessive. They assumed great airs, and as their salaries were so high, and their titles very lofty, they formed a sort of court around the Lady of the House. Little Ben, having the power, though not so high in many respects, had great influence in the coffee-room. Nevertheless not a few of the waiters there growled that they were obliged to play second-fiddle to a man from the "Jerusalem."

Little Ben had taken it into his head, we say, that the sign-board of the Queen's Inn could be improved, and that he was the man to improve it. So after consulting his principal friends, and with the consent of the Lady of the House, he broached the matter in the bar-room of the old inn. He simply said that the Alhambra palace or Hindoo court had been taken over from the ground landlords in 1858, and that no change had been made in the style of the inn, nor any

new sign-board put up over the door, although that was a great and magnificent addition to it. It seemed to him this fact ought to be celebrated in some way, and as every other important inn seemed now to be running under the name of an Imperial Hotel, he proposed that they should change the old sign-board of the Queen's Head, and put one over the door of the Hindoo court, and call it the "Queen and Empress Crown Hotel." He took it as a matter of course that any such suggestion coming from him would meet general approval, and he said he was quite willing to undertake to change the sign himself.

At first the idea fell on indifferent ears. No one had considered what it meant or what it involved. But the irrepressible Bobby, though he was out at elbows, had not lost his wits. He turned upon Little Ben, and said,

"I don't know why you are going to do this! I'm quite satisfied with the old name. You want to change it——"

"Not change, I beg you to observe," interrupted Little Ben with dignity, "but add to it."

"None of your Hebrew flummery!" replied Bobby. "I'm not a fool. If you alter the sign over the Hindoo court, and imitate all those confounded Imperial hotels, you may depend upon it, that by-and-by people will get the names

confused and will call us all round 'The Empress Crown Hotel' instead of 'The Queen's Inn.' Mind what you're doing. That Alhambra palace is a big place, but we may not be able to keep it up for ever, and after you have given it a name which will swallow up ours, you may find yourself obliged to let it go, and then what a fool you'll look!"

Big Billy also made some hasty observations, to which Little Ben only replied, "Walker!"

The matter got bruited about the house, and there was a good deal of talk. Some ingenious people wrote squibs and scattered them about the tables, and the guests became very much divided among themselves on the matter. The better class of them said they didn't like the thing at all, but that now that Little Ben had mooted it they didn't see how they could avoid adopting it, without slighting the Lady of the House. On the other hand, a large number of very thoughtful people, who had looked round and through the proposal, said it was most dangerous to the interests of the Queen's Inn, and likely to lead to very serious results. What if the Hindoo managers became unmanageable? What if the guests took it into their heads not to pay for their lodging, and the concern should become bankrupt? In any case,

what advantage was there in tarnishing the grand old sign and adopting the meretricious splendour of those grand hotels, which were notorious for more show than reality of comfort, and for very tyrannical and troublesome arrangements? The dissatisfaction swelled into excitement, and the bar-room of the Queen's Inn was crowded with disputants both ways. Undoubtedly the most active and earnest disputants were against the title, and unfortunately they were on the side of that party which was led by Big Billy and several very first-class waiters, among whom was one whom they nicknamed "Strong-and-Hearty," because he had a good appetite and could always hold his own. He came from Devonshire.

Little Ben was a great lover of mystery. He had read about the Sphinx, and had seen it at the Crystal Palace. It always looked like a monstrous cat watching the universe for mice and birds, and its united cunning and stolidity had a fascination for Little Ben. So he winked to everybody and said :

"Look here! None of you fellows understand me. You don't know and can't imagine what I'm up to! *I* know. So does Staffy [the bar-keeper]. So does Salsify [who used to look after the accounts of the Hindoo house and bully the

sub-manager]. There's a number of us knows grave reasons why this alteration should be made."

"Look here!" replied Strong-and-Hearty, taking off his coat, rolling up his shirt-sleeves, and showing a pair of big, brawny arms. "Look here, Little Ben, I'm going to fight about this. It's your humbugging Brummagem work again! Now we don't mean to stand it. Tell us straight out what you're up to, or I'll——"

He didn't say exactly what he would do, but he looked it. Big Billy also threw away his dirty napkin, and rubbed up his hair, and talked to that extent and with that degree of heat, that Little Ben visibly shuddered.

He said:

"The truth is, Little Ben and his friends don't really know what they're doing. I've read history, and I know what comes of changing names like this. He's only copying those big hotels with their vulgar assumption of grand names. Now I say if you call the Alhambra court the Imperial Hotel, and change the sign to the 'Empress's Crown,' that's a finer name than this, and all the world will call this Inn the 'Empress's Crown Hotel,' as sure as life. It is idle to say that we can carry on this part of the business under one name and that under

another. Common people are sure to catch at the higher title. The sign will be changed, and I want to know what you are going to do with the Queen's Head that hangs over the doors? Will you stick a crown upon it? Will you call the Lady of the House 'Manager of the Queen's Inn and the Empress's Crown,' or 'Manager of the Empress,' or what? How will the bills be made out to people? I say the head-waiter is embarking on a dangerous course. Before we know it we shall find our glorious old Inn converted into an hotel, and people will think we have taken on the airs of those palaces across the way."

Altogether Strong-and-Hearty and Big Billy looked so ferocious, and talked so loud, that Staffy the bar-keeper thought it time to interfere, so he rolled up his sleeves, and stood out, and gave tongue.

"If you want to fight," he said, "we're ready. You fellows are trying to get up a partizan row to drive us out of the management. You've gone about shouting amongst the guests and frightening them into an unreasoning panic. It's all bosh! *I* mean all *you* say. You know we have an immense concern at the Hindoo court, and we found the people who frequent it wanted it called by some new name to distinguish it."

"That's exactly what I want to avoid," interrupted Big Billy.

"You shut up. We have our reasons. The place *has* been called the 'Empress's Crown' before."

"When?" said Big Billy, who couldn't shut up.

"Why, there was a letter written by the manager asking a stray Wallah to come and stay there, and he called it the 'Empress's Crown Hotel.' There was a Nawaub wrote for rooms the other day, and he addressed his letter to 'the Manager of the Empress's Crown Hotel.' Then there was another fellow, I don't exactly know who, or what he said, but it is evidence in the same direction. As for Bobby there saying we may have to give up the place some day, I'm ashamed of him! He ought to be turned out."

A lot of people in the room shouted "Turn him out!" and Bobby looked very red in the face, but he said, "So we may."

"Exactly," said Staffy, "and a nice fellow you are to mention such a thing if you thought it!"

There was a good deal of sparring, in words, and everybody grew very excited. The matter was adjourned, but next day two or three of the younger waiters went and asked Little Ben what the grave reasons were for abandoning the fine

old name and taking a new one, and he said "he wasn't going to tell them." Moreover, he tried to frighten them. He said "the reasons were of that kind that the business of the inn would be in jeopardy if he were to let them out."

In all the rooms of the old inn, high and low, nothing was talked about but the proposed change. "What did it all mean?" "Who wants it?" "What a cursed piece of buffoonery!" "What does the Lady Manager say about it?" etc., etc. Every one was angry the question had ever been mooted, even Little Ben's best friends; but then they said, "Now he has proposed it we must back him up. It will never do to let him lose the headwaitership." And so against the grain they imperilled the success and good name of the Queen's Inn for the sake of keeping their side in.

Another meeting was held in the bar-room, which was very hot and crowded and dusty. Then Little Ben announced he meant to advise the Lady Manager to restrict the use of the title "Empress's Crown Hotel" to the Hindoo court, and on no account were any of her children to be allowed to take on airs because of the new name.

"How are you going to restrict the use of the name?" cried Big Billy. "The people in the street will look up and see the sign, and won't they use the name? Of course they will. Not

only that! the chambermaids and flunkeys upstairs, and all those sort of people will call the Lady of the House, Manager of the Empress Crown Hotel, and then by-and-by the guests and every one outside will do the same."

It was no use for Little Ben and Staffy to deny this, though they really did not believe it. Only their own people agreed with them. Several of the juniors tried to induce Little Ben to promise that the name should not be changed, but that there should be a new sign painted after the old pattern and put up over the Hindoo court. They said, "You are going to make this the Empress's Crown Hotel, Limited, now. What's the use? If they want a compliment over at the other house, give them the same compliment we enjoy, and hang up a new sign with our name on it."

But he was inexorable. The fates had decreed that the place must be called "Empress Crown Hotel," or by Heaven there were consequences so dreadful to view that he dared not face them.

There was another meeting in the bar-room, and a tremendous row. Big Billy, roaring gently as a sucking dove, remonstrated at great length. He said:

"I'm not going to fight, but these are my sentiments. Heaven knows what may come of

this. We're all disgusted. Every one else is disgusted—some visibly; others invisibly. Besides, how are you going to mark the table-napkins and the sheets, eh? Will you mark *their* linen 'Empress's Crown Hotel,' and *our* linen 'Queen's Inn,' or *vice versa*, or which way? And what if they get mixed in the wash? Eh? Don't you see you're getting into an endless muddle? Then there's the forks and spoons. What are you going to do about the waiters' buttons? The whole thing is a tawdry piece of humbug, utterly unworthy of a great business or of the head waiter of such an inn as this. We have made our home under this old sign-board. We have grown from small to great things. We are known by that sign the whole world over. Some of us have been born under it, and we love it. Now you're going to set to work with your Hebrew paint-brush and your Aryan art, and you'll blot it, you'll ruin it. I protest against your tinkering such a reverend institution."

Big Billy was so eloquent and so strong that Little Ben jumped forward as soon as he had done, and let out at him pretty freely.

"You talk," he said, "about marks on napkins and forks and spoons! Stuff! All that will arrange itself. The bills will be headed to suit the purpose. You say every one objects to the

change. Why look here! Here's the Directory calls the Alhambra an 'Imperial Hotel.' Everybody reads the Directory, so everybody agrees to it. But"—and here his voice grew solemn and portentous—"there are graver reasons than these. We all know how persistently the 'Imperial Bear Hotel' proprietor has been buying up the property in our neighbourhood. Only one court twenty feet wide intervenes between his outhouse and the pantry of the Hindoo court. A biscuit can be thrown from one to the other. What if our servants should be bribed? What if our guests became dissatisfied? What if—too terrible to contemplate!—they should look across upon the sign of the Imperial Bear Hotel and find no corresponding sign over their own door? Gentlemen, the tenure of our Hindoo court depends on this momentous question."

There was a pretty outburst on this. Newcastle Jim, Bobby, and others cried "Shame!" They had never heard a man so rashly challenge the attention of his guests, or give such nonsensical reasons to his rivals for such a grave step. But he carried the day, and the matter was referred to the coffee-room.

You may guess that the excitement of this affair was not confined to the Queen's Inn. It

got out to the other Hotels, and some of the astute proprietors of those places half-laughed and half-swore at it.

"That comes of your general proprietary," they said. "When we want to change our name or alter our mode of doing business, we don't go and consult a lot of greasy waiters and impertinent patrons. We do it ourselves. Poor Madame, she certainly is to be pitied: not to have her own way in her own house!"

The proprietor of the "Imperial Bear" took it more seriously. He growled. "Ho! ho!" cried he. "So you give me notice of fight, do you? You let me know you don't mean to allow me to come too close to your Alhambra palace, eh? Crowing cocks don't always win the day. Humph!"

The rest was buried in his bosom. But one thing is certain. He thought the management of the Queen's Inn was idiotic. Bobby said so, distinctly, but every one took 50 per cent. off Bobby's expletives.

When the matter had been fought out in the bar-room, it had been practically settled. They were quieter and more dignified in the coffee-room, and besides more careful of the feelings of the Lady Manager, as was natural and perhaps right. Whether they liked it any better is another question.

In the end it was decided to alter the name of the Hindoo court to the "Empress Crown Hotel, Limited," a word added to let the public know that it wasn't the same thing as the other hotels, which were rather absolute. And Little Ben undertook to prepare the sign, with the approval of the Lady of the House.

Every one about the place laughed when Little Ben took off his dress coat, assumed an Aryan artistic air, and set to work with a big paint-brush on the new sign-board.

The spectators shrugged their shoulders and looked sorry, and murmurs deep and loud reached him as he went on improving, with new and vulgar adornments, the noble, time-honoured old sign. Some zany among them suddenly called out—

"THREE CHEERS FOR THE EMPRESS'S CROWN!"

but he had the wit to bolt out of the place before the enraged onlookers could catch him. The sign was finished and hung up over the entrance to the Hindoo court, and in the old inn everybody was disposed to forget it.

But the head-waiter conceived that his work was not yet done. It was due to the Lady of the House to give some indication of the addition that had been made to the general dignity of the inn. This must be done on the old sign, which no sacri-

legious hand had ventured for so long a time to touch. It was impossible to do this by day. So at night Little Ben summoned courage and took a ladder, and a pot of what he thought was gold paint. In truth, being somewhat nervous, he had made a mistake and had seized a pot of lamp-black. Staffy the bar-keeper, who ought to have known lamp-black from bullion, held a lantern which threw a dim, mysterious glare on the ancient figure. And then, trembling in hands and knees, Little Ben proceeded to improve upon, or "add to" the grand old sign, so ancient, so venerable, the relic of the work of noble hands, instinct with the truest, simplest, and most potent art, renowned, beloved, cherished, enshrined in a thousand choice and happy memories of time, and place, and person, with his tricky Aryan brush and Brummagem skill. He was so alarmed and hurried, he scarce knew what he was doing. His idea was to fix upon the majestic head a tinsel Imperial crown. He painted away. Staffy's lantern shook to and fro. On went the brush over the old sign, over the brow, destroying the fine sentiment which that uncovered head displayed. The work was done, and he descended. When people rose in the morning a cry was heard in the street. The old inn was roused. Everybody rushed out.

Some were wringing their hands. Others looked gloomy. All were angry. For there upon the Queen's Head, on the venerable board, the ruthless and frivolous hand had painted in an ugly black crown, which seen from below had no beauty, or harmony, or meaning, but only looked like a great blot on the hitherto unrivalled sign of the Queen's Head !

Little Ben has long since gone to his reward. Big Billy has also found some other scene of labour, without which no place would be to him a Paradise. Strong-and-Hearty, who afterwards became head waiter himself and discharged the duties of that post with great dignity both in the bar-room and coffee-room, was gathered to his fathers and other ancient relations. In the fullness of years and of successful management the Lady of the House was buried, and her memory is cherished still—but it is the memory of the manager of the “Queen's Head,” and not of the “Empress's Crown.” Under the former she had won her high repute; the other could add nothing to it. Bobby also disappeared mysteriously, and it is supposed to this day that he was altogether too independent to die like

other people, and that as he was of a classical turn, he may have ended in a translation.

But all that was foreboded by the party of free ideas came to pass. Outsiders insisted on paying to the manager of the "Queen's Inn" the compliment of calling her the manager of the "Empress's Crown." Flunkeys inside the old establishment took it up. The bills and the linen, and the forks and spoons of the two places got mixed. People had no time to stop and draw distinctions when they were constantly passing from one house to the other. Graver things have happened in the business of the two houses which I do not care here to relate, but some of the difficulties can clearly be traced to the unhappy change made by Little Ben in his absurd ambition to tinker that old and honoured title. And alas! the old name is nearly forgotten, and when now and then a man who knows the story passes the Inn, he sighs as he looks up at the once glorious sign, which still shows how much more truly prophetic than all the rest was Little Ben, when he unintentionally painted THE BLOT ON THE QUEEN'S HEAD.

STRAHAN & CO'S RECENT PUBLICATIONS.

THE WISE WOMAN.

By George Mac Donald, Author of "Alec Forbes," &c., &c. Post 8vo, cloth, price 10s. 6d.

"It is as beautiful and finished a work as we have ever had from Mr. Mac Donald."—*Graphic*.

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND AND RITUALISM.

By the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone, M.P. Demy 8vo, stiff wrapper, 2s.; cloth 2s. 6d.

POEMS.

By Emily Pfeiffer, Author of "Gerald's Monument." Fcap. 8vo, cloth, price 6s.

Tenth thousand, with a new Preface.

THE DEVIL'S CHAIN.

By Edward Jenkins, M.P. Small 8vo, cloth, price 5s.

By the same Author.

GINX'S BABY; HIS BIRTH, AND OTHER MISFORTUNES.

Crown 8vo, cloth, 2s.

LORD BANTAM.

Seventh Edition. Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s., or cheap edition, cloth, 2s. 6d.

LITTLE HODGE. A COUNTRY CAROL.

With Five Illustrations. Fourteenth Thousand, cloth, price 5s.

STRAHAN & CO., 24, PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON.

THE ENGLISH FAMILY MAGAZINE.

Sixpence Monthly, Illustrated.

EVENING HOURS

EDITED BY LADY BARKER.

It is the aim and ambition of the Publishers of "EVENING HOURS" to provide a thoroughly good and attractive Family Magazine, such as will not only be worth buying, but will be worth keeping, and reading many times.

Among the Contributors for 1876 are The ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, The Right Hon. W. E. GLADSTONE, Dr. W. B. CARPENTER, LADY VERNY, C. C. FRASER-TYTLER, GEORGE MAC DONALD, &c., &c.

A NEW STORY,

WINIFRED MARTIN,

By the Author of "A Candle Lighted by the Lord," appears from month to month.

THE NEW STORY,

GERMAN LOVE,

Edited by Professor MAX MÜLLER, will be continued from month to month until completed.

THE SELF-MADE MAN,

A Series of Papers by SAMUEL SMILES, Author of "Self Help," was begun in the March Part, and will be continued monthly.

THE NEW STORY,

LUTCHMEE AND DILLOO,

By the Author of "Ginx's Baby," is begun in the March Part, and will be continued throughout the year.

STRAHAN & CO., 34, PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON.

Photomount
Pamphlet
Binder
Gaylord Bros., Inc.
Makers
Syracuse, N. Y.
PAT. JAN. 21, 1908